

CHAPTER II

STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN READING COMPREHENSION

A. Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is determined by decoding and language comprehension skill. Each of these components is assumed to be necessary but not sufficient, for success in reading. According to Wooley (2011:33), “reading comprehension is a very complex cognitive activity. Comprehenders are not viewed as merely passive recipients of information but as active constructors of meaning”. While, Snow (2002: 13), “To comprehend, a reader must have a wide range of capacities and abilities”. According Harris and Graham (2007:5), “Students with learning disabilities are likely to demonstrate difficulties with decoding fluency (reading words quickly and accurately), and vocabulary”.

From the statements, the researcher considers that students need to have skill with a wide range of reading comprehension. Thus, students unlimited to be able reading material, but further need to comprehend the meaning of the word implicitly. A student who has understood successfully a sentence will be able to respond to the information. Snow (2002:11) argues, “reading comprehension as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. We use the words extracting and constructing to emphasize both the importance and the insufficiency of the text as the determinant of reading comprehension”.

According to Pressley cited in Saskatchewan (2004:36), “Comprehension strategies are the centrepiece of the literacy curriculum”. Reading comprehension refers to the understanding of printed text proficient readers engage in an intentional problem-solving process to comprehend. This process has a before, during, and after component. Most readers who are explicitly taught reading comprehension skills and strategies are likely to learn, develop, and use them spontaneously Collins Block, & Pressley, 2001 in Saskatchewan (2004).

Reading is one basic skills in learning a language. It is an active process which following by physical activities such as an eye movement when the reader reads the passage. During that process, many things are happening. Like the reader is looking at printing material, deciphering the marks on the page in some sense, deciding what they mean and they relate to each other. In other words we called it comprehension. Comprehension is mental process which will be found in the mind of the readers who reads the written material. Comprehension is the reader understanding of the meaning of the printed language. The reading process to the language form, while comprehension relates to the language content as the end of product.

B. Definition Learning Difficulties

Learning difficulties usually experienced by students in schools. Learning difficulties at school can vary which can be grouped by source of difficulty in the learning process, both in terms of receiving a lesson or to

absorb the lessons. Thus, the notion of learning difficulties can be interpreted as a student difficulties occurred during follow the lessons conveyed or assigned by a teacher. Basically, everyone have differences in terms of intellectual, physical ability, family background, habits and approaches to learning that may affect their ability to absorb the lessons.

There are people who feel that learning is easy, there are mediocre, and some even find it difficult. It can be seen from the value or achievement they earn. Students who have difficulty in learning will gain value is less satisfactory than other students. According to Quesland studies authority in Westwood (2008:3), states that: "Learning difficulties refer to barriers that limit access to, Participation to, and out comes from the curriculum". The learning difficulties may be due to the external factor such as sociocultural disadvantages, limited opportunities to learn, a lack of support of home, an inappropriate curriculum, or insufficient teaching. The students who have learning difficulties referred to as slow learners and low achievers (Westwood, 2008:5).

Saskatchewan Teaching Students with Reading Difficulties and Disabilities : A Guide for Educators (Saskatchewan learning, 2004: 10) Learning difficulties or learning disabilities “ refer to number of disorders, which may effect the acquisition, organization,retention, understanding, or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders effects learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from

global intellectual deficiency. Learning difficulties result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering, or learning. These include, but are not limited to language processing, phonological processing, visual spatial processing, processing speed, memory and attention, and executive functions. Learning disabilities range and in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following: a) Oral language (e.g., Listening, speaking, understanding); b) Reading (e.g., decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension); c) Written language (e.g., spelling and written expression); d) Mathematics (e.g., computation, problem solving).

C. Learning Difficulties Factors

In a learning process, there are many problems that have to be faced by the learners. The problem in learning is called by learning difficulties. Some students have difficulty in learning process. It can show by the lack of score or their achievement in subject matter. As Westwood (2008:44) stated:

“ students may have learning difficulties for a variety of reasons, some intrinsic to the child (e.g., below average mental ability; attention deficits; hearing or vision problem; learning disability), but others are due to outside influences including inappropriate school curriculum or methods of teaching”.

From Westwood statement above, there are two reasons why students may have learning difficulties, first factor is students' internal factors. Such as: students' motivation, cognitive aspects, family, health, etc. The other factor is external factor come from the environment of students' live with or the school

where the students' learning. The external factors such as: school facilities, teaching method, curriculum, etc. According to Saskathewan(2004: 14) "research on possible causes and the exact nature of learning disabilities on going. The literature identifies several possible contributing factors. These conclude neurobiological differences, genetic factors, and other risk factors".

Westwood (2008:56), learning difficulties is caused by some factors that influence in learning process. The factors influence in learning such as:

1. Inappropriate Teaching

Insuficient or inappropriate teaching can be a major factor cause learning difficulty. By using suitable teaching method and practice, perhaps the teacher can reduce educational failure and increase the level of achievement that reach by the students. Effective teaching practice provides students with the maximum chance to learn. This practice can increase achievement through maintaining students' attention and task behavior.

This affective practice includes listening to the intruction from the teacher, answered and asking questions, discussing with the teachers, working on assigned task independently with a group, and applying previously acquired knowledge and skills. According to Jacobsen et al in Westwood (2008:56), " studies have shown that students who are receiving explanations, cluesand direct instruction from the teacher spend more time to the content of the lesson and paticipating more fully.

2. Unsuitable Curriculum

Curriculum is the total learning experience provided by a school. It includes the content of courses (the syllabus), the methods employed (strategies), and other aspects, like norms and values, which relate to the way the school is organized. Curriculum sets the process of teaching and learning running well in order to increase the quality of teaching and learning, a good system of teaching is a system which appropriate with the situation and condition of the students as the education object.

Teaching methods and practice not only the factor cause learning difficulty. The the content of curriculum can also create problems. Students who find the unsuitable curriculum will difficult to reach the level of knowledge or skill the material's task on their subject. By providing a suitable curriculum, students will easy to catch the knowledge and skills based on their conditions such as age, ability, and motivation.

3. Classroom Environment

Classroom is a place as students' second home and place where the students absorb the knowledge and skills during teaching and learning process. According to Brown (2000:192), "One of the simplest principles of classroom management centers on the physical environment for learning: the classroom its self". As Westwood (2008:60) states that the physical environment of the classroom can exarbate learning difficulties. The noise level and multiple sources of distraction can have detriemental impact on the attention span and on-task behavior of some students

4. Poor Relationship between Teacher and Students

students have different strategies for learning and achieving their goals. A few students in a classroom will grasp and learn quickly, but the some time there will be those who have to be repeatedly taught using different techniques for the student to be able to understand the lesson. And the other hand, teaching then becomes difficult, especially if there is no proper communication. That is why teacher and students have to develop a good relationship in order to create a positive teaching and learning situation. Positive student-teacher relationships are characterized by open communication, as well as emotional and academic support that exist between students and teachers.

D. Reading Difficulties

An individual with reading disability demonstrated difficulties in reading skills that are unexpected in relation to age, cognitive ability, quantity and quality of instruction, and intervention. The reading difficulties are not the result of generalized developmental delay or sensory impairment (Mather & Goldstein in Saskatchewan, 2004:12). According to Saskatchewan (2004:12), Reading disability may be characterized by :1) Difficulties in single word reading; 2) Initial difficulties decoding or sounding out words; 3) Difficulties sight word; 4) Insufficient phonological processing; that is, the understanding that sentences are comprised of words, words are made up of syllables are made up of individual sounds or phonemes; 5) Expressive or receptive language difficulties; and 6) Difficulties with comprehension.

Based on Cuesta (2003), there are five main components contained in reading comprehension. They are vocabulary, main idea, supporting details, reference, inference. In this research, the researcher uses five components of reading comprehension that students need to comprehend. Such as, comprehending or grasping the main idea, comprehending detail information, comprehending vocabulary or the meaning of the sentence, comprehending or making inference, and comprehending reference.

1. Comprehending the Main Idea

The reader is supposed to define and to understand the main ideas from the reading text. Understanding the main idea is a skill that the readers can find what is the reading text telling about. It means that finding the main idea of the text is an important skill required for a comprehending a paragraph. Main idea of paragraph is very important specific comprehension skills.

Chesla (2001:11) states:

“finding and understanding the main idea of a text is an essential reading skill. When you look past the facts and information and get to the heart of what the writer is trying to say, that’s the main idea.... similarly, writers write because they have something they want to write about, and they have something they want to say about that subject. When you look beyond the facts and information to what the writer really wants to say about his or her subject, you’re looking for the main idea.”

According to Cuesta (2003) although the topic sentence may appear anywhere in the paragraph, it is usually stated in the beginning of the paragraph. Based on the statements, the researcher takes assumption that the

main idea is a gist of one's thought that includes the researcher explanation or opinion about the fact in the paragraph.

2. Understanding Detail Information

As stated by McWhorter (2001:186), "Information detail is necessary in order to explain the idea that the writer wants the reader to know about the information is about reading text." Details, major and minor, helps readers to understand the main idea and help the readers understand the point(s) the writer is attempting to express, identifying the relationship between these will increase comprehension. Supporting detail can be understood by giving question like how, what, when, where, why, how, much or how many.

From statement above, it is clear that detail information can serve a basic information that is used to supply supporting evidence in a reading text. Identifying detail information is important for the reader because the reader often find the question of a reading text in which its answer is stated explicitly by the author. Therefore, to make sense of the new information provided by the text, a reader must have some knowledge of what its content in the reading text. If the reader cannot determine the information in the text, it means the reader cannot comprehend the text perfectly.

3. Understanding Vocabulary

Besides having comprehension the main idea and the detail information, students need to have vocabulary mastery too. In order to understand the text, readers need to know the meaning of individual word.

They construct and understanding of the text by assembling and making sense of the word in context. According Hiebert & Kamil (2005:4), “vocabulary serves as the bridge between the word-level processes of phonics and the cognitive processes of comprehension”. Therefore, lack of vocabulary can cause students obstructed to comprehend the meaning of the sentence perfectly. The text obliges the students to have adequate ability to comprehend the meaning of the text. The ability to understand the meaning of word is deepended on how frequent the readers spend the time to read.

4. Understanding Inference

As stated by Suzanne & Perfetti (2012:7), “to make sense of a text , skilled readers make inferences that bridge elements in the text or otherwise support coherence necessary”. From the statement, the inference is always connected with the reading text or the opinion of the writer. It is using clues in the text to state explicitly what is happening now or what happened in the past. Thus, inference tends to reflect prior knowledge as well as personal believes and assumptions when they are reading a text. Therefore, a reader who is able to conclude the text implicitly is considered to have sufficient comprehension ability.

5. Understanding Reference

One of the skills to comprehend reading text is mastering the reference words. It is important to master reference word which includes pronouns in reading comprehension. Mastering reference words will helps the students to determine their understanding and to avoid ambiguity

meaning in reading. Thus, in order to read effectively and comprehend a reading text, one of the primary ways is mastering reference words.

Chesla (2000:171) explains that writers do not like to use the same word many times. They often use other word which means almost the same thing. Sometimes pronouns are used instead of nouns. They are small words, but they are very important when you are reading. Reference in reading comprehension is the use of the demonstrative pronoun in a reading text. Reference word includes word like he, she, her, this, that, these, it, its, and which (Nation, 2009:4). For example, this can refers to singular nouns, to a phrase, a clause, or a group of clauses or sentences "she" usually refers to singular of female person. To know the reference often used in order to avoid the subject repetition.

According to Harmer (2002: 203-207) some problem in teaching and learning reading skill that are faced the teachers are:

a. Language

In the case of written text some researchers look at word and sentence length (Wallace 1992 in Harmer 2002:207), on the premise that texts with longer words will be more difficult to understand than those with shorter ones. It means that if students faced the situation, they will get difficult because longer sentences and longer words will be more difficult to understand than those with shorter ones.

b. Topic and Genre

The teaching of respective skill sometimes will not go as we want it to be because of the inappropriate topic or unfamiliar genre they are dealing with and will not interest to learn (Harmer, 2000:205).

c. Comprehension Task

When the teacher wants to give the task and choose the comprehension tasks to do it, sometimes that the kinds of tasks are not helping the students to more understand the skill. It is more likely to be testing them. By testing they will not be appropriate way of accomplishing the student's improvement in this skill (Harmer, 2000:207).

d. Negative Expectations

Before the students are starting to learn the skill, they already have negative expectations. They have feeling that they are not going to understand the passage because it is bound to be too difficult and they will be frustrating and de-motivating.

According to Saskatchewan (2004:35), "the critical elements of reading instruction. Its important for teachers to understand students who have a reading disability will require intensive direct instruction". The critical element reading instruction conclude: Strategies for reading comprehension; strategies for building meaning using the cues and convention of language (including phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, awareness of sentence, structures, and organization patterns, and pragmatics of text); and reading fluency.

E. Difficulties in Learning Reading Comprehension

Difficulties can be defined as something difficult; or a think hard to do or to understand; that which occasions labor or perplexity, and requires skill and perseverance to overcome, solve, or achieve. In teaching and learning activity, teachers often find some students have difficulty in their learning. It can be show by their low score or achievement in several subjects for example in English. English is still regarded as a difficult subject and difficult language to learn by students. One of the elements of english that is regarded difficult to be mastered is reading comprehension. Here students have difficulties in understanding skill of comprehension in reading paragraph. In English matter, some students may have problem finding the elemen in paragraph under students comprehension in reading text.

The students might face difficulties in understanding reading text such as the difficulty to understand the generic structure in paragraph. It might cause the students cannot recognize the detail information and the main idea from the text. If the students cannot find difficulty in understanding word meaning on reading text, it might cause the word difficult or unfamiliar for them. Whereas, the students can find difficulty in finding inference and reference on reading text, it might caused the sentence is too long. So that, the students are confuse while they are reading the text given. According to Wooley (2011:34): “Reading comprehension difficulties are often seen as a complex combination of related problem. These problems are often interconnected and difficult to isolate”. The statement shows that in reading process, the students usually have

some problems in reading comprehension. Students cannot identify the sentence meaning in the text and they also cannot identify the information in the text materials. As a result, difficulty is one aspect that causes students failed in English lesson.

